

VZCZCXRO1370
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHAE #0324/01 1691429
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 171429Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9746
INFO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 0445
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0068
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0025
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0618
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000324

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND PRM
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2018
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SU](#) [EG](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT'S ERITREAN DEPORTEES LAND IN MASSAWA

REF: STATE 064810

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Embassy inquiries regarding Egypt's deportation of Eritreans were met with deception, lack of knowledge, and surprising openness from different sources. A well-placed Embassy source informed Emboffs of Egypt Air's deportation flights to Massawa, a location more concealed for Egyptian/Eritrean cooperation on deportations than Asmara International Airport. An Egyptian Embassy official apparently misinformed Emboff of his government's intentions, and local UNHCR officers were unaware of the fate of deportees. End Summary.

RELIABLE SOURCE - SOME ERITREANS DEPORTED, MORE TO FOLLOW

¶2. (C) On June 16, Emboff was informed by a highly credible Embassy source that Egypt Air was facilitating the deportation of Eritreans from Egypt to Eritrea. According to the source, the first flight arrived during the early morning hours of June 16, and the rest were scheduled one per night until June 22. (Note: Source's information did not track with Amnesty International claims that deportation charter flights have been ongoing since June 11. End Note.) The source said the planes contained around 200 passengers, including women, children, and the elderly, and were landing in Massawa rather than Asmara. The passengers were immediately disembarked upon arrival, with the plane returning directly to Egypt. The source noted the Egyptian security services in Cairo informed the Egyptian Embassy in Asmara that the information was "top secret" and not to be revealed.

EGYPTIAN EMBASSY DENIES DEPORTATIONS

¶3. (C) On June 16, Egyptian Embassy Deputy Hossam Abdallah Nooreldin informed Emboff no Eritreans had been deported from Egypt, and that he would know if they were. He stated that on June 13 or 14 the Egyptian government decided to halt deportation plans until UNHCR reviewed the cases. Hossam seemed surprised at the level of USG interest in the deportations, stating that illegal immigration from Africa in general and Eritrea in particular was a difficult matter that needed to be addressed. Emboff reported Hossam seemed

uncomfortable during the conversation, and believed that Hossam was likely aware of the flights but instructed not to reveal this information.

GSE TELLS UNHCR "NOTHING TO SEE HERE"

14. (C) UNHCR Protection Officer Jose Gonzaga (protect) told Emboff on June 17 that UNHCR officers in Egypt had access to Eritreans held for deportation in Aswan, but the Eritrean government had denied requests to visit returnees. Gonzaga said he may receive a list of the deportees' Eritrean contact information, which will allow UNHCR to contact family members to check whether the deportees are being held or were released.

COMMENT

15. (C) Deportees face incredible hardships after arriving in Eritrea. W'ia, their likely destination, is a desert detention facility south of Massawa holding large numbers of national service evaders and individuals caught attempting to illegally leave Eritrea. It is reportedly similar to a concentration camp, with hundreds of prisoners herded nightly into a small bivouac area with no facilities. Those found to have evaded national service or deserted the military potentially face severe physical punishments. Other prisoners face lengthy incarceration.

16. (C) Landing the deportation flights in Massawa rather

ASMARA 00000324 002 OF 002

than Asmara is most likely an attempt to maintain secrecy. Asmara's airport is close to the city with only a few flights per day. The arrival of an off-schedule flight would likely attract attention, as would buses loaded with deportees traversing the length of Asmara toward Massawa enroute to W'ia. Massawa's airport does not host commercial passenger traffic, providing enhanced operational security. The airport is located approximately seven miles from the city, protected by a road checkpoint five miles away. Massawa is a small city with very little vehicle traffic, especially after dark, and roads from the airport toward W'ia bypass the center of town.

MCMULLEN